forest product on forest dwelling communities including tribals.

(c) The Central Government intends to introduce a legislation in Parliament to this effect and necessary consultation is underway.

Number of elephants in the country

†4702. SHRI P.K. MAHESHWARI: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the number of elephants is declining rapidly in the country;

(b) if so, the figures of number of elephants during the last five years;

(c) the major steps taken by Government in this regard keeping in view the decreasing number of elephants; and

(d) the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA): (a) and (b) No, Sir. The estimated population of elephants in the country has shown an increase from 25,877 in 1997 to 26,413 in 2002 when the last census was carried out.

(c) and (d) Elephants have been included in Schedule 1 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 which prohibits their hunting and also trade in ivory. Export of ivory from the country is also banned. India is a signatory to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna & Flora (CITES) which prohibits international trade in ivory and other elephant products. Government of India provides financial assistance under Project Elephant to major elephant-bearing states in the country for protection of elephants and their habitats and also for mitigating human-elephant conflict An amount of Rs. 13.34 Cr. was released under the Project during 2004-05. 25 Elephant Reserves have been notified in the country for the systematic and focused management of elephants. Government of India has also empowered the C.B.I, under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 to apprehend and prosecute the wildlife offenders.

Factories Polluting the Rivers in Kerala

4703. SHRI N.K. PREMACHANDRAN: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have identified any public or private sector factories which pollute the rivers in Kerala and if so, the details thereof;

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†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.